

Montgomery falls far behind Fairfax in money spent to attract jobs

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The amount of money Montgomery County spends on job creation lags behind rival Fairfax County and five other U.S. counties, according to a new report.

The county Department of Economic Development spends \$1.6 million on job growth each year, or \$1.65 per resident. Fairfax spends \$6.6 million, or \$6.11 per resident.

Only seven of the 32 employees in Silverman's department focus on job creation and expansion, while 41 of the private Fairfax Economic Development Authority's 44 staff members do.

Compared with economic development organizations in Fairfax and Prince William, Baltimore and Howard counties, and Miami-Dade County and St. Louis County, Montgomery has the smallest budget for and spends the least per resident on job creation, the report by the International Economic Development Council found.

Agency director Steven Silverman told the Montgomery County Council that his department needs more money and staff to catch up with Fairfax.

Silverman's spending would need to increase by more than \$4.3 million annually to match Fairfax County's per-person spending, the report shows.

"It's not an issue of just resources. It's an issue of how resources are allocated," Silverman told the council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee. He said he would benefit from having more staff working with individual companies like Fairfax does.

Fairfax has recruited more jobs and more new businesses -- and headquarters for such corporations as Hilton Hotels and Northrop Grumman -- than Montgomery over the past several years, despite similar populations.

Councilman George Leventhal, D-at large, noted Fairfax has an advantage because Northern Virginia has the Pentagon while Montgomery has health agencies like the National Institutes of Health.

"Money lavished on the Pentagon, it may go up and down, but it will always be greater than the amount spent on curing disease and alleviating suffering. ... And so Northern Virginia will have a relative advantage over Montgomery County forever," he said. "In America the life-saving business is less lucrative than the life-ending business."

But Councilwoman Nancy Floreen, D-at large, disagreed. Much of Montgomery's ability to recruit business comes down to reputation, she said. "You don't hear too much about a Fairfax County anti-business environment."

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